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Held at Headquarters, New York, on Wednesday, 7 November 2012, at 3 p.m.

Chair:	Mr. Messone	(Gabon)
later:	Ms. Borland (Vice-Chair)	(Belize)
later:	Mr. Messone	(Gabon)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 52: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (*continued*)

1. **Mr. Fakhry** (Lebanon) recalled that while the General Assembly had established the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in 1949 to respond to the needs of the refugees from Palestine, a group of leaders in Israel had already completed a plan for the ethnic cleansing of Palestine in 1948. According to Israeli historian Ilan Pappe, the plan had included detailed methods for the eviction of people from their property, including large-scale intimidation, setting fires to homes and goods, and even planting mines in the rubble to prevent inhabitants from returning. The plan had been highly effective.

2. While international humanitarian law and resolutions seemed to be inconvenient for Israel to implement, acting according to law and morality was not a matter of convenience. If the right of Palestinians to have their own State were left to negotiations, and if the right of return were left to Israel's convenience, then Israel would effectively be granted a veto over the Palestinian people's rights to self-determination and to return to their homes. His delegation therefore reiterated its call on the international community to compel Israel to abide by the norms of international law, international humanitarian law, and United Nations resolutions.

3. A just settlement of the refugee question was instrumental to the peace process. Despite the extremely difficult conditions under which the refugees lived, they would not simply disappear, nor would the people around the world who supported their just cause. Lebanon was actively working with UNRWA to improve the living conditions of refugees in the country. Further, not only had his country eased restrictions on refugees to enter the labour market, but the Lebanese-Palestinian Dialogue Committee had been revitalized.

4. **Mr. Ben Sliman** (Tunisia) commended UNRWA along with the host countries that cooperated with it, and expressed his appreciation for its staff who, despite increasingly difficult working conditions, had demonstrated their dedication to the protection and care of Palestinian refugees. There were concerns, however, over the serious challenges the Agency faced, particularly its funding shortfalls, as well as the policies and actions of Israel that made it difficult for UNRWA to deliver services. Israel was required to further ease restrictions on the movement of Agency staff and to expedite the transportation of humanitarian materials.

5. As the casualties of the armed conflict in Syria included a significant number of Palestinian refugees, the implications of the situation in Syria on the stability and protection of the half million Palestinian refugees across that country were a matter of deep concern. It was important that UNRWA be given the means to continue to ensure the protection of those refugees, and he called on all parties in the conflict to respect the neutrality and integrity of United Nations installations and of areas where Palestinian refugees resided.

6. It was important that the international community continued to demonstrate its full support and commitment to UNRWA by mobilizing resources and expanding the scope of donor countries and institutions. Such support would significantly help the Agency to continue its ongoing reforms and use its resources more effectively.

7. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that UNRWA was alleviating the sufferings of millions of Palestinian refugees pending their return to their homeland. That was a political, legal and moral responsibility even more than a humanitarian responsibility. A whole nation had found itself a victim of external, colonial interests. The international community was totally paralysed regarding the application of General Assembly resolutions dealing with the Israeli occupation, and thus was encouraging Israel to pursue its settlement policies.

8. Indeed, it was strange that the same States that provided Israel with illegal protection against the implementation of United Nations resolutions considered themselves as defenders of human rights. That trend was scandalous, and the United Nations should not remain silent, as such inaction undermined the Organization's credibility.

9. Arab countries hosting Palestinian refugees were not merely host countries but donor countries as well, providing as they did services for those refugees. Syria hosted more than half a million Palestine refugees, provided them with various forms of support and treated them like Syrian citizens. In 2011, Syria had spent some $233 million to help the refugees. That was

an increase of $8 million compared to 2010, despite the difficult conditions in Syria. Syria also actively supported UNRWA efforts to carry out its mandate. While it was regrettable that Palestinian refugees were among the victims of the crisis that Syria was currently facing, had it not been for the measures taken by the relevant authorities to protect them, much greater harm would have befallen them.

10. **Ms. Niang** (Senegal) said that since 1948, a majority of the Palestinian population had been forced into exile, creating a precarious situation that her delegation deeply deplored. Furthermore, it was regrettable that the relevant General Assembly resolutions had not been implemented even though they represented a rational basis for an end to the conflict. The international community could no longer turn a blind eye to the plight of the Palestinians.

11. UNRWA provided vital aid and assistance to some 5 million refugees across the region, and its forward-looking vision placed special emphasis on education and health care. The Agency nevertheless faced substantial financial difficulties which put the proper execution of its mission at risk. She called on the international community and all partners and donors to support the Agency's work, which was all the more vital given that recent events in the Arab world had further aggravated the plight of refugees in the countries concerned. Further, she reiterated her delegation's call for a revision of the 1974 framework whereby only a tiny fraction of UNRWA expenses were covered by the regular budget of the United Nations. In conclusion, she expressed her sincere gratitude and encouragement to all the host countries that had offered, for many decades, their hospitality to millions of refugees forced into exile.

12. **Ms. Gunnarsdottir** (Iceland) said that the situation of the Palestine refugees in Syria was a matter of great concern to her country. Violence and displacement resulting from the conflict continued to intensify the humanitarian needs of those refugees. As many as 225,000 refugees had been directly affected by the conflict and thousands had been forced to leave their homes, displacing many of them for the second time in their lives. Iceland applauded UNRWA efforts to assist the Palestinian refugees affected by the conflict.

13. The situation of Palestine refugees in East Jerusalem and Area C was also of great concern. Refugee families continued to be devastated by the Israeli practice of demolishing homes, basic infrastructure and sources of livelihoods, as well as by its settlement activities, including the construction of the wall on occupied Palestinian land. Iceland was concerned about the village of Al-Walajeh, which was being encircled by the Wall, and its mainly refugee population.

14. The United Nations had recently estimated that Gaza would no longer be liveable by 2020 unless urgent action was taken to improve water supply, power, health and basic education. Reiterating Iceland's position that the blockade of Gaza was contrary to international humanitarian law, she asked for it to be lifted immediately, and stressed that the current financial situation of the Agency was unsustainable. Even though UNRWA was never meant to be permanent, it was badly needed until a just solution was found for the refugees.

15. **Mr. Shaanika** (Namibia) said that his delegation called for additional funding from the United Nations regular budget for UNRWA, so that the Agency could continue providing essential programmes and services like education, health care, vocational training, and emergency relief. Such assistance to refugees was a responsibility that the United Nations was morally bound to discharge. The moral trumpet was summoning the international community to be compassionate towards the people of Palestine until the realization of their most cherished dream, an independent and viable State of Palestine.

16. While the strengthening of UNRWA was critical to the Agency's operational success, the issue of occupation, which remained the source of the Palestinians' suffering, must not be forgotten. The Palestinians deserved to live in dignity and were entitled to create a State of their own. Thus, Namibia supported the admission of Palestine into the United Nations as a full member.

17. **Mr. Taguri** (Libya) said that UNRWA had been established to address the needs of tens of thousands of Palestine refugees. Sixty years later, there were 5 million refugees who struggled on a daily basis to obtain a bare minimum of dignity in their lives. The achievements of the Agency were impressive, not only because of the increased number of refugees, but also because of the arbitrary measures adopted by the occupying Power.

18. Israel, using its security concerns and other administrative measures as a pretext, had attacked UNRWA vehicles, thereby violating United Nations conventions. A solution to the problem of the refugees would require the ending of Israel's occupation. Palestine refugees must be given the right of self-determination, the right of return and the right to establish an independent state with Jerusalem as its capital.

19. **Mr. Motanyane** (Lesotho) said that his delegation expressed regret that the hope of Palestinians for a better future continued to recede from sight. Israel's blockade of Gaza was an overarching problem that severely impaired UNRWA work and prevented it from implementing vital construction projects. Despite Israel's statements in support of the Agency, its action did not equate with its words. Not only did the blockade amount to a collective punishment of innocent civilians, it crippled the economy of Palestine.

20. Underscoring the chronic problem of inadequate funding for UNRWA, which had been exacerbated by the ongoing global financial crisis, he said that the Agency's status as a subsidiary organ of the General Assembly dictated that adequate funding should be a priority. The importance of predictable funding to the Agency could not be over-emphasized. He called on all States to consider making financial contributions, and urged UNRWA to continue seeking ways to operate more effectively and efficiently.

21. He regretted the loss of life among the Agency's staff, and called on the occupying Power to protect UNRWA personnel, as well as United Nations property and premises in accordance with its obligations under international law. In conclusion, he reiterated Lesotho's unwavering support to UNRWA for its service to the Palestine refugees, and called on the international community to combine efforts to ensure that the two-States solution, with Israel and Palestine co-existing side by side in peace and security, became a reality.

22. **Mr. Erdman** (United States of America) said that thanks to the longstanding support of donors and hosts, UNRWA humanitarian programmes, including education, health and social services, had improved the lives of millions across the region. The commitment of UNRWA to peace and tolerance had served as a vital force for stability.

23. The United States was proud to be the largest bilateral donor to UNRWA, contributing more than $233 million in 2012, including $125 million to the Agency's core budget. His country was deeply concerned, however, about the Agency's ability to continue providing critical humanitarian assistance to Palestinian refugees in the face of its chronic shortfalls. Donors, hosts, and UNRWA must determine how to move forward together to confront the serious financial challenges facing the organization. Commending the continuing generosity of those Governments that had hosted Palestinian refugees for many years, he urged them to continue the legacy of protection. UNRWA must continue its efforts to expand its funding base and maximize value for money in its management of limited donor funding, and Governments should share that international responsibility.

24. **Mr. Celik** (Turkey), Chair of the Working Group on the financing of UNRWA, highlighted the many challenges the Agency faced in fulfilling its mandate, including a greater number of refugees, sociopolitical developments in the Middle East and North Africa, the ongoing crisis in Syria, and the continuing illegal blockade of Gaza. In light of those challenges, the Agency's prospect of success was directly linked to the timely support that the international community could provide.

25. His predecessor had recently sent a letter to the President of the General Assembly and other high-level officials, including the Heads of the Arab League and the African Union, calling attention to the dire financial situation of the Agency. If not funded, UNRWA would not be able to pay its personnel in December.

26. He also noted that in Gaza, the UNRWA emergency appeal was less than 50 per cent funded. Nevertheless, he expressed gratitude to all of the traditional supporters of UNRWA, new donors, and those who had increased their donations. He urged all States to fully support the Agency, and affirmed that Turkey would continue to support its Palestinian sisters and brothers.

27. **Mr. Jacob** (India) said that support for the Palestinian cause had been a cornerstone of India's foreign policy. His country also endorsed Palestine's bid for full and equal membership in the United Nations. During a recent visit to India by Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, memorandums

of understanding had been signed to strengthen India's contribution in the areas of information and communications technology, vocational training and education. India had also announced a contribution of $10 million to help address Palestine's financial requirements, and Mr. Abbas had inaugurated the new Palestinian Embassy building, which had been constructed with India's support.

28. India had increased its annual contribution to UNRWA to $1 million, starting with the 2009-2010 financial year, in addition to a special contribution of $1 million to that body in response to a flash appeal in 2010. Over the past three years, India had also contributed $10 million annually to the Palestinian Authority, and had invested in several projects in Palestine through the India-Brazil-South Africa Trust Fund. UNRWA still faced chronic underfunding, however, which adversely impacted the quality and level of services. The blockade of Gaza had entered its sixth year, not only causing hardship to the population, but also limiting the movement of UNRWA staff members and hindering that entity's work. Israel should lift the blockade and allow the resumption of normal socioeconomic activities there.

29. **Mr. Selim** (Egypt) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made by the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement, and stated that his country was deeply concerned about the persistence of Israel's denial and violation of the rights of the Palestine refugees, millions of whom remained in the refugee camps established for them decades ago throughout the region. Israel's illegal practices had extended to targeting UNRWA personnel and facilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, and had obstructed the Agency's ability to uphold the mandate given to it by the General Assembly.

30. He called for the full lifting of the Israeli blockade which had been unjustly imposed on the Gaza Strip for more than five years. The occupying Power must cease its restrictions on the import of necessary construction materials, which were vital for allowing the Agency to proceed with the reconstruction of damaged refugee shelters, vital civilian infrastructure, and desperately-needed schools in the Gaza Strip.

31. He expressed alarm at the occupying Power's growing efforts to discredit and intimidate different United Nations bodies and organizations, and reiterated his country's full support for the steps taken by the Palestinian leadership in order to achieve the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people

32. **Ms. Cordeiro Dunlop** (Brazil) said that UNRWA had made an outstanding contribution to relieving the plight of the Palestinians and enhancing their living conditions over the past 60 years. She also recognized the help provided to the Agency by its Palestinian staff on the ground, whose skilled work and determination constituted yet another proof of the Palestinians' capacity to build a State of their own. Four generations of Palestinians had benefited from the Agency's services, and she urged that, in light of the current stalemate in the peace process and the persisting Israeli occupation, efforts to assist UNRWA with substantial financial and political support should be redoubled.

33. The international community needed to act with urgency with regard to the Gaza Strip, and developed countries in particular should quickly increase contributions to the Agency so as not to allow UNRWA to lose the means to accomplish its mission. Brazil had gradually been increasing its voluntary contributions and, with bilateral and multilateral partners, was fostering several cooperation initiatives for the well-being of the Palestinian people. Building and sustaining peace was a daily endeavour, and it was much harder for stability to take root where poverty and lack of opportunities prevailed.

34. **Mr. Haniff** (Malaysia) said that his delegation commended UNRWA for its consistent and unwavering contribution to alleviating the plight of the Palestinian refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, Syria, Lebanon and Jordan. As a member of the Special Committee to Investigate Israeli Practices, he had visited the refugee camps in neighbouring countries in July. UNRWA currently operated more than 600 schools, provided basic healthcare and food services, and constructed shelters for the refugees, despite very limited resources.

35. Palestinians continued to bear the brunt of Israel's continued violations of international law, particularly humanitarian and human rights law. The dire situation in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, the continued blockade of Gaza and the illegal but relentless expansion of settlements were attempts to slowly destroy the ability of Palestinians to build a

productive and peaceful future based on the two-State solution.

36. Malaysia was also deeply concerned with the Agency's current financial status. If the international community could not bring about a political solution to the Palestinian question, at a minimum it should provide adequate funding for the needs of UNRWA, 57 per cent of which were currently covered under appropriations from the regular United Nations budget. Malaysia sought the cooperation of colleagues on the Fifth Committee to increase that funding, which in his delegation's view should be on the order of 85 or 90 per cent of the Agency's needs. Malaysia had been a firm supporter of UNRWA and a consistent contributor to its funding since 1978. Malaysian non-governmental organizations and volunteers had also been active in contributing in-kind assistance to the people of Palestine.

37. **Mr. Aiyas** (Saudi Arabia) said that his delegation was grateful to the staff of UNRWA, and offered its condolences to the families of those who had lost their lives while carrying out their duties. In the matter of the Agency's funding shortage of $37 million, the international community and institutions should increase their contributions. More staff and more resources were needed to implement programs, establish health centres and build schools. Saudi Arabia, aware as it was of the important role played by the Agency, had increased its support and currently held third place among the main contributors.

38. The illegal activities of Israel, especially new settlement projects in the West Bank and the continued, unjustified blockade of Gaza, deserved the strongest possible condemnation. All restrictive measures should be lifted immediately, and the separation wall that had been built on Palestinian land in the West Bank should be demolished. Furthermore, Israel should compensate UNRWA for damage to its buildings and facilities. The Israeli occupation was almost the only occupation remaining in the world. In the hope of bringing it to an end, the Government of Saudi Arabia had played and continued to play an active contributory role in the peace process.

39. **Ms. Alkhayyal** (United Arab Emirates) said that her delegation was concerned about the social and human conditions of the Palestinian people, and especially the refugees, whether they were in the occupied territories or neighbouring countries. The violations of the occupying Power targeted not only Palestinian people and their properties but also affected the programmes and facilities of UNRWA. The United Arab Emirates believed that the measures taken to ease the Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip were insufficient. The international community must exert more pressure on Israel to have the blockade lifted entirely, thereby enabling the normalization of life in the area.

40. A just solution to the Palestinian question must include the right of the Palestine people to return to their homes and to receive compensation for the tremendous moral and financial losses they had sustained. The Palestinian refugees, whether inside the Occupied Territories or in the diasporas, should be provided with full protection. The dire financial shortage faced by UNRWA would hamper its ability to provide services as well as emergency assistance to the Palestinian refugees. The United Arab Emirates pledged to continue its political and financial support for UNRWA and called on member States to step up efforts to enable the Agency to perform its mandate.

41. **Mr. Takahashi** (Japan) said that Japan recognized that addressing the issue of the Palestinian refugees was of critical importance for the Middle East peace process, as highlighted by the current crisis in the Syrian Arab Republic. Japan had provided assistance to the Palestinians through UNRWA since 1953, even before its accession to the United Nations, in recognition of the crucial role of UNRWA in the region. The significant aid provided by his country to UNRWA was part of Japan's efforts for the realization of peace in the region. Japan had attached particular importance to assisting Palestine refugees in the area of human resources development through education and vocational training. In order to achieve a viable Palestinian State, it was essential for Palestinians to create solid economic and industrial foundations and develop administrative institutions and human resources. To that end, Japan would continue to support various projects in the Jordan Valley under the Corridor for Peace and Prosperity initiative. Japan hoped through that initiative to establish a good model for regional cooperation. Since 2007, Japan had also extended a series of non-project grants-in-aid to the Palestinian Authority to promote the Authority's economic and social development efforts. Japan had been pursuing coordinated efforts with East Asian countries such as Indonesia and Malaysia in order to contribute to Palestinian state-building efforts. His

Government welcomed the efforts that had been made by UNRWA to implement the ongoing organizational development process in order to improve the Agency's administration and operations. The recent visit to Japan by the Commissioner-General had helped to raise awareness among the Japanese people of the situation of Palestinian refugees and the activities of UNRWA.

42. *Ms. Borland (Belize), Vice-Chair, took the Chair.*

43. **Mr. Rahman** (Bangladesh) said that his delegation greatly appreciated the continuing efforts by UNRWA to provide efficient, quality services to Palestine refugees. While he had full confidence in the Agency's ability to fulfil its humanitarian and human development mandates, there were grave concerns about the security of its staff, despite repeated calls to the Israeli authorities to ensure their safety. Furthermore, UNRWA should be provided with information on detained staff, and restrictions that hindered the Agency's activities and movements should be lifted, in accordance with the relevant United Nations resolutions.

44. His Government strongly condemned illegal Israeli activities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, including intensive military operations and the expansion of settlements witnessed since December 2007. The issue of settlements was the major obstacle to the achievement of a two-State solution to the conflict in the Middle East. Assistance to Palestinians from donor and host countries was appreciated, but the international community should come forward with further support, particularly for the rehabilitation and emergency assistance programme. In conclusion, he commended the Commissioner General and the staff of UNRWA for their commitment and hard work in the face of continued adversities.

45. **Mr. Alzayani** (Bahrain) said that the work of UNRWA was enabling refugees to obtain the basic services and facilities that they needed. The Agency's comprehensive reform plans had improved the efficiency of its administration, strategic planning, service delivery, human resource management and communications technologies. The Secretary-General, in his report on strengthening the management capacity of UNRWA (A/67/365), had underscored the significant innovations in the Agency's financial management. For example, UNRWA was one of the few United Nations agencies to have introduced a rigorous closure of monthly accounts, a step forward acknowledged positively by the United Nations Board of Auditors

46. The report of the working group on the financing of UNRWA (A/67/382) had noted with grave concern the funding gap in the Agency's General Fund, reiterating that it was above all the responsibility of the international community to ensure that the Agency's services were maintained at an acceptable level, in quantitative and qualitative terms, and that funding kept pace with the changing needs and growth of the refugee population. The gap had arisen because contributions to the Agency's funds had not increased in proportion to those needs. That problem must be addressed immediately so that humanitarian operations would not be impeded. At such a sensitive time, austerity measures must not be allowed to compound the problems caused by the structural deficit in the General Fund.

47. Given sufficient resources, he was confident that the Agency would be able to overcome its challenges. For over six decades, UNRWA had shown great skill and professionalism in providing vital services to Palestine refugees in order to alleviate the effects of foreign occupation and forced displacement. It must be allowed to continue fulfilling its tasks pending a comprehensive solution to the conflict in accordance with international law and, in particular, General Assembly resolution 194 (III), which enshrined the right of Palestine refugees to return to their homes and properties.

48. *Mr. Messone (Gabon) resumed the Chair.*

49. **Ms. Abu** (Israel) said that there had been significant omissions of both fact and context in the statement of the Commissioner-General, who had just devoted a considerable part of his briefing to the dire financial situation of UNRWA. The President of the General Assembly had also recently stressed the Agency's financial needs and had called for the separation of its political and humanitarian missions. However, the history, mandate and modus operandi of UNRWA made it impossible to separate those missions, and the Agency's mandate was indeed political. Not only did it receive much more funding per refugee than the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), but, unlike UNHCR, it perpetuated refugee status instead of working towards reintegration. Its mandate was open-ended and no longer included resettlement, so that the Agency would

always need additional funds as the population of Palestinian refugees grew.

50. The Agency's mandate, which should be re-examined, was not only political, but the main reason for the financial deficit. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the only one in which refugees were held hostage, pending a political solution, and, as the Palestinian Authority had not taken any responsibility for the refugees, UNRWA had to care for every aspect of their lives. The Agency itself did not distinguish between political and humanitarian issues because it was spending significant amounts of its humanitarian funds to advocate the Palestinian cause, despite its dire financial situation. UNRWA should leave such efforts to other advocacy organizations.

51. Israel fully supported the humanitarian aspects of the work of UNRWA, yet was able to separate its political and humanitarian aspects. Her Government remained committed to the 1967 Comay-Michelmore exchange of letters between Israel and UNRWA and approved most of the Agency's requests quickly, providing it with access to Israeli officials. The Commissioner-General had failed to mention that cooperation in his brief.

52. The sole purpose of Israel's blockade of Gaza was to prevent the entry of arms, weapons and material with dual-use applications. It was important to prevent the smuggling of arms to Hamas and the other terrorist organizations operating in the area. In 2012 so far, 530 missiles, rockets and mortar shells had been fired from Gaza into Israel. For perspective, she noted that when just one mortar shell had fallen in a Turkish town on the Turkish Syrian border, it had provoked Turkish fire in response. Yet Israel experienced hundreds of those attacks every year.

53. Despite the constant rain of rockets, mortars and missiles from Gaza on Israeli civilians and Israel's fundamental duty to stop the flow of weapons, the Israeli Government had continued to take steps to support the economy in the area and had approved 219 projects overseen by the international community, including 92 UNRWA projects. Nevertheless, 33 per cent of the approved projects had not yet been implemented and 4 per cent had been cancelled by international partners.

54. The States that made inflammatory statements against Israel should offer tangible support to the Palestinian people through contributions to such organizations as UNRWA. According to UNRWA statistics, Saudi Arabia had appeared among the Agency's top ten major donors in 2012, although in the previous ten years, not one Arab or Muslim country had appeared on that list. The international community should oppose the use of humanitarian funds and organizations to sustain a political issue, and the Agency's mandate should be adjusted to reflect a separation of politics from humanitarian work.

55. Israel was committed to resolving the refugee problem, along with all other core issues of the conflict, which could only be settled through direct negotiation and painful compromises. Prime Minister Netanyahu had called again and again for direct negotiations to begin immediately, without preconditions. He hoped the Palestinians would sit down at the negotiating table, instead of simply offering the same empty rhetoric in international forums.

56. **Mr. Zhu** Yanwei (China) said that his Government urged Israel to lift the blockade against the Gaza Strip and to grant unimpeded access to goods, humanitarian relief and construction materials to allow the people living there to return to a normal and dignified existence. The international community should continue to monitor the issue of Palestinian refugees and make greater contributions to the socioeconomic development of Palestine. His delegation was concerned at the shortfall in funding and the freedom of movement restrictions and threats to the personal safety and security of UNRWA staff. China had contributed to UNRWA since 1981 as testimony to its Government's support for the Palestinian people and the work of the Agency.

57. **Mr. Pham** Vinh Quang (Viet Nam) said that his Government commended UNRWA for its efforts to continue to deliver its programmes and to improve its effectiveness. The United Nations, Member States and the international donor community should continue to support the work of the Agency.

58. His delegation remained concerned about the lack of progress in the Middle East peace process, the volatile situation in the Gaza Strip and the issue of Palestine refugees. In the light of the heart-rending poverty, food insecurity and dependence on international aid described in the Agency's report, and given the fact that Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, military operations, land confiscations, settlement

construction and expansion, home demolitions and other practices were still affecting the refugee community and impeding the work of UNRWA, his Government called upon the occupying Power to cease all military and settlement activities and to end its blockade to provide immediate protection for the Palestinian population in Gaza in accordance with international humanitarian law. The staff members of UNRWA must be given suitable and safe conditions to be able to carry out their difficult work.

59. **Mr. Erroja** (Morocco) said that no progress had been made with the Palestinian cause for many years and the peace process faced huge challenges because of obstacles raised by the Israeli regime, which was impeding the construction of a Palestinian State with East Jerusalem as its capital. It was impossible to speak of human rights without recalling the settlement policy in the Palestinian towns and villages which had turned the lives of millions of Palestinians into a nightmare. Homes had been destroyed and agricultural land made useless in order to expand settlements and thereby create facts on the ground that would preclude a two-State solution, in violation of the Geneva Convention and international law. Israel was obligated to honour its commitments pursuant to international law and to respect the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War in the occupied Palestinian Arab lands, including East Jerusalem and other Arab lands occupied by Israel since 1967. The city of East Jerusalem was the main target of the Israeli authorities' policy of altering local demographics and tightening the noose around the Palestinians, forcing them to emigrate.

60. Morocco, which currently held the Chair of the Al-Quds Committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, recalled the importance of compliance with United Nations resolutions which called on Israel to cease all actions causing the alteration of the characteristics of the city of Al-Quds al-Sharif; any changes made would be null and void and without legal affect on account of the spiritual role of the city for both Muslims and Christians.

61. Israeli human rights violations in the Occupied Palestinian Territories denigrated human dignity and the right to a decent life, contravening international humanitarian law, the Fourth Geneva Convention, international human rights standards and the two international human rights covenants. Member States were urged to bring pressure to bear on Israel to resolve the situation of political prisoners and administrative detainees, many of them peaceful activists, who had not been charged and had no legal representation. The blockade of the Gaza Strip also violated human rights standards and constituted a form of collective punishment.

62. The Israeli occupation was exacerbating the difficult economic situation and harming the Palestinian people. According to the World Bank, the budget deficit of the Palestinian Authority threatened its ability to provide basic services and pay salaries. The lack of funding for UNRWA was already threatening its programmes and could have a disastrous impact if no solution was found.

63. Morocco reiterated its support for peace in the region and for the right of the Palestinian people to an independent State, with East Jerusalem as its capital, with borders recognized by the international community. It supported Palestine's application for non-member observer State status in the United Nations.

64. **Mr. Ceylan** (Turkey), speaking in exercise of the right of reply, said that the reference by the representative of Israel to cross-border fire from Syria into Turkey was outside the scope of the agenda item. However, since the issue had been raised, he noted that the Security Council had expressed its condolences for the loss of life and had condemned the shelling by the Syrian armed forces. In addition, Security Council resolution 1860 (2012) had called for an end to the illegal blockade on Gaza. Israeli operations in Gaza should not be compared with Turkey's proportionate act of self-defence.

65. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that he thanked delegations for their messages of support and solidarity. The Palestine refugees faced complex challenges that varied with their location. The refugees in Syria had been hosted in a very respectful way for many decades, but the current situation clearly demonstrated their vulnerability. Delegates could be reassured that UNRWA would continue to deliver its services, despite the many difficulties highlighted during the discussion. The Agency would continue its advocacy on behalf of Palestine refugees, which was an integral part of its mandate and not, in fact, tantamount to politics. The Agency would also

continue the reform process that had been started in 2006, if resources permitted.

66. He remained concerned at attacks that had been made on the Agency in the past few months, and the claim that UNRWA was the cause of the refugee problem. Those attacks had not come from any Government, but from groups that could nonetheless be influential in some countries. The developments in Syria were also a cause of concern, and he appealed to all those who were parties to or had any influence on the conflict to avoid at all cost any involvement of Palestine refugees, as such involvement could only be detrimental to the refugees and exacerbate the conflict in Syria.

67. Ongoing restrictions in Gaza did not apply to humanitarian goods, which had also been true even during the strictest period of the blockade, between 2007 and 2010. After 2010, when there was an easing of restrictions, UNRWA and the Government of Israel had agreed on a system of clearance for projects requiring the importation of building materials. However, the export of goods remained almost completely forbidden. Exports, while not directly of concern to UNRWA operations, were important because they could strengthen the economy in Gaza and reduce dependency on aid. In that respect, the blockade was contrary to international law and should be lifted. It did not constitute an appropriate response to Israel's legitimate security concerns and merely exacerbated tensions.

68. On the issue of resources, while financial contributions to the Palestinian Authority were important, they did not benefit UNRWA. Furthermore, while it was true that that the Agency had received an additional $5 million in its previous budget, it was not true that much of that money had been used to establish an office in Washington. The liaison office in Washington was very small and, in any event, the Agency would be closing its office in Geneva.

69. He thanked the delegations of the European Union, Switzerland and Malaysia for their announcements of additional contributions, and appealed to countries in Latin America, Asia and the Arab region to increase their contributions or to make contributions if they had not already done so. He thanked those delegations, in particular Japan, which had expressed support for the expansion of the Agency's donor base. The Fourth Committee should remain focused on the urgent need to bring a close to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The meeting rose at 6.05 p.m.